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The second Paper read was—

2. *A Communication from SIR GEORGE BOWEN to the DUKE of NEWCASTLE.* Containing Reports upon the Formation of a New Settlement at Cape York, at the Northernmost point of the Australian Continent; and upon the completion of the Survey of the Inside of the Great Barrier Reef, off the North-east Coast, by Commander ROBINSON, R.N.

Communicated through the COLONIAL OFFICE.

THE suggestion of a station near Cape York was made by Sir George Bowen, Governor of Queensland, in a despatch of 4th April, 1860; and the Lords of the Treasury and Admiralty having concurred in the general project, his Excellency and Commodore Burnett (the senior naval officer in Australia) received instructions to visit the district with a view to ascertaining the best site for an establishment. The voyage of inspection was made on board H.M.S. *Pioneer* in August to October, 1862, and the result was communicated in a series of reports, from which the following are extracts.

SIR GEORGE BOWEN relates that having embarked in Moreton Bay on 27th August, and fallen in with the south-east trade-wind, the *Pioneer* made a good passage under canvas, inside the Great Barrier Reef, to Booby Island, in Torres Straits, the farthest limit to the north-west of the jurisdiction of Queensland. From the 10th to the 22nd September the ship was at anchor near Cape York, principally in Evans' Bay and Port Albany, during which time he and Commodore Burnett carefully examined the neighbourhood of the north-eastern point of the Australian continent. They came to the conclusion that the proper site for the projected settlement was Port Albany, which combined almost all the required advantages. Close to the landing-place was found good and safe anchorage, sheltered from all winds, for a limited number of vessels: while whole fleets might ride safely at anchor, at no great distance, in Evans' Bay during the south-east monsoon, or in Newcastle Bay during the north-west monsoon. There is also abundant pasturage, good soil for gardens, and plenty of timber, stone, and lime, both on Albany Island and on the mainland, from which the island is separated by a deep channel only one-third of a mile broad. The temperature was remarkably cool for the tropics and healthy for Europeans, the thermometer marking never above 85° during the expedition. Above all, a plentiful and evidently never-failing supply of fresh water was found, although their visit was at the close of an unusually dry season. Near the north east point of Albany Island a rill of pure water, fringed with flowering shrubs and grasses, trickles over the cliff into a small natural reservoir, which was

named the "Fountain of Arethusa," from its close resemblance to the Homeric fountain in Ithaca. The place chosen for the proposed settlement was on the bank immediately over the anchorage at Port Albany; but the future town—destined, perhaps, to be one day the Singapore of Australia—would doubtless grow up on both sides of the narrow channel separating Albany Island from the mainland. It would be named Somerset, in acknowledgment of the readiness with which the present First Lord of the Admiralty had lent his aid to an undertaking of such great importance to the interests of the British Empire in Australia. Very friendly relations were established with the small tribe of aborigines frequenting the neighbourhood, and the party were enabled to communicate with them by the help of the excellent vocabulary of their dialect printed in the Appendix to the 'Voyage of H.M.S. Rattlesnake.' Their physical characteristics differed in no essential respect from those of the same race elsewhere; but their arms, canoes, and other implements were of a somewhat better description. The general aspect of the coast along which the *Pioneer* sailed, in the voyage to and from Cape York for nearly 3000 miles, resembled that of Southern Italy and Greece. The mountain-ranges of northern Queensland have much of the picturesque outline and rich colouring of the Apennines in Calabria, and of the hills of Euboea and of the Peloponnesus; while the group of islands through which they threaded their way often reminded them of the isles of the *Æ*gean and Ionian seas.

COMMODORE BURNETT reports that, having decided to examine first that part of the mainland of the northern extremity of Australia which lies to the westward of Cape York, inside Endeavour Strait, the *Pioneer* proceeded, on the 10th September, from Booby Island to an opening on the said mainland in longitude $142^{\circ} 12' 20''$, which proved to be too shallow for the light boats to get more than one mile up in salt water, although the *Pioneer* (drawing 12 feet) anchored within two cables' length of its entrance. Hence, on the same day, the ship was taken to and anchored within the channel of Dayman Island, inside of which Simpson's Bay is marked on the Admiralty chart. During the 11th September lines of soundings, taken across Simpson's Bay, showed that it is a worthless anchorage, full of shoals and very irregular soundings, and fit only for very small craft. The whole south coast of Endeavour Strait is very sandy close to the sea, with numerous salt-water creeks, into some of which light boats may get. From the appearance of the mouths of many of them, and from the grass growing near them, he felt satisfied that a great deal of fresh water must find its way by them to the sea at certain seasons. From the 12th to the 15th September the ship was

anchored at Evans' Bay, the country about which was examined, and small supplies of fresh water found in holes (*i. e.* native wells), in the two positions only marked in the Admiralty plan of the bay. Whilst anchored here he visited what has been described in the 'Australian Directory' as "Mew Rivulet," but found the water perfectly salt. Evans' Bay was a moderately good but contracted anchorage, with poor holding-ground, and quite exposed to winds from the north-east and east. The ship then proceeded to Port Albany, and Albany Island was traversed in all directions. He found, in company with Sir George Bowen, numerous springs of excellent water, which appeared to be never-failing, although the dry season was at this time at its height. Albany Pass was a spacious and fair roadstead, with nowhere more than 13 fathoms at low water. Port Albany is convenient for large steamers, and its adjacent bays on Albany Island are good and safe for small craft. The mainland from Bishop Point to Vallack Point was next examined. In Shallow Bay no fresh water was found. In Somerset Bay fresh water seems good and abundant at two places. In Fresh-water Bay was found abundance of fresh water breaking through the sand at different parts of the beach, and also small streams apparently coming from swampy ground. The best site for the first establishment of a healthy station would be on Seymour Point, Albany Island. This point is not commanded by any height near it, and has open forest country close inland from it on Albany Island.

MR. WALTER HILL, Director of the Botanic Gardens of Brisbane, who accompanied the expedition as botanist, states that he carefully examined Albany Island during three days, and found it upwards of three miles in length and one mile in its greatest breadth. Its outline is irregular, from the number of bays with small rocky headlands. The land consists of three-fourths open forest, the rest being scrub. Several hundred acres of the open ground have scarcely a tree upon them, and are thickly covered with excellent grasses suitable for grazing purposes. The greater part of the soil consists of red sandy loam, mixed with small ironstone nodules, and varies from 6 to 15 inches in depth. In addition to grazing capabilities, there are several spots where the soil is well adapted for the growth of most useful vegetable productions. The rocks are either a stratum of ironstone in irregular masses, or a very coarse sandstone. The latter is suitable for building purposes. On the eastern side of the island are large beds of coral, of the best description for making lime. During three other days he extended his researches to two or three miles into the interior of the mainland opposite Albany Island. One important result was the finding of two fresh-water

streams, about 8 feet wide, and running in different directions: one emptying itself about one mile from Fly Point, the other nearly opposite Port Albany. The latter waters a fine valley, where trees grow in great luxuriance. Along the valley are some beautiful clear flats, with fine open forest ground. The soil of these flats is of great depth, and consists of black loam. The variety of trees on the mainland is much greater, and they are of a better description for building purposes than those found on Albany Island. Between Mount Bremer and Evans' Bay, close to Cape York, there is a belt of scrub and a tract of forest. The soil here consists of rich black sandy loam, about 24 inches in depth. The soil at Evans' Bay is not adapted for the cultivation of any plants that are used for commercial purposes, on account of its general sterility; but fresh water of excellent quality was found in two native wells in the scrub at the back of the beach.

CAPTAIN ROBINSON, commander of the *Pioneer*, subsequently addressed several communications to Sir George Bowen on the subject of the new settlement, and also on the inner route for vessels inside the Great Barrier Reef. In the first, dated May 10th, 1863, he describes the manner in which he had executed the mission entrusted to him of planting fruit and cotton trees on Albany Island; concluding by saying that this work would, in one or two years, prove of inestimable value to mariners and crews of ships passing from all portions of the world, who, without diverging 5 miles from their course, would then obtain the supplies they most need, and which cannot now be obtained at a less distance than 1500 miles. In the second letter, dated July 2nd, 1863, he describes the advantages which the inner route offers to the colonists of Queensland. He first reverts to the publicly-expressed opinion of Commodore Burnett, that the Great Barrier Reef, hitherto regarded by seamen as a bugbear, was one of Queensland's greatest blessings, being a natural breakwater to the South Pacific Ocean, and making the intervening sea from the Percy Islands to Cape York *one great and secure harbour*. The greater safety of the "inner" over the "outer" route appears to be allowed by everybody; but it was supposed to have a disadvantage in ships being obliged to anchor five or six times, causing a loss of time. But there is in reality no loss of time, and it is better to have the trouble of anchoring five or six times in secure waters than to endure the anxieties of the outer route, where, after all, anchoring has to be resorted to three times, exposed to the ocean-swell, which sets with much violence against the reef. According to the 'Australian Sailing Directory,' twenty-one days is a fair passage from Sydney to Booby Island by the "outer route," and twenty-five to thirty

days a fair passage by the "inner route;" but the shortest passage known was performed by the inner route, namely, by H.M.S. *Rattlesnake* and two merchant-ships, which cleared Booby Island on the twelfth day after leaving Sydney. The advantages and facilities are very great for the establishment by a colonial company of a line of steamers to run fortnightly between Sydney and Singapore, *via* the "inner route," and Cape York.

The PRESIDENT said he was happy to find that the views of Sir George Bowen, the enlightened Governor of Queensland, were sustained by such great naval authorities as had been quoted, and particularly by the Hydrographer to the Admiralty, Captain Richards, whose report upon the subject he was sure would be considered of national value.

SIR CHARLES NICHOLSON said the difficulties which were encountered by Mr. Scott in endeavouring to get from the coast-range down to Rockingham Bay were precisely those which might have been predicated by any one at all conversant with the physical geography of Australia. The great coast-range, extending from Cape York on the north, down to Wilson's Promontory on the south, exists with scarcely any interruption, forming an abrupt escarpment towards the sea, and gradually trending off to the plains in the interior. In colonising the country from the coast the great difficulty has always been to get over this great barrier. The first colonists of New South Wales occupied the country in the neighbourhood of Sydney for twenty-five years before they were able to get across the Blue Mountains. It is only on two or three points, where rivers make their way to the coast, that access is afforded into the interior. One of these points is the valley of the Fitzroy River; there is a depression there in the coast-range, and facilities are afforded for getting into the interior plains of the country. It was this difficulty of getting across the dividing range which led to such disastrous results in the expedition undertaken by Mr. Kennedy, who ultimately perished in his exploration farther north. The description given by Mr. Scott and his companion Mr. Dalrymple, who is well known in the history of Australian expeditions, is confirmatory of the statements made by Leichhardt, who first discovered the country, and who gave the names quoted by Mr. Scott, the Lynd, the Mitchell, the Gilbert, and the Burdekin. Leichhardt described this central country as of surpassing beauty, and as consisting of basaltic table-land. He was afraid Mr. Scott rather under-estimated the difficulties of getting from the dividing range down to the coast; probably the only way would be to approach from the coast upwards, following the course of some river which found its way into the sea at that point. It was interesting to observe how rapidly the process of exploration and occupation is going on in this magnificent region. He was afraid almost to speak of its future destinies. He had had opportunities of seeing considerable portions of Australia, and he had never seen any part which impressed him so much with its vast capabilities as the southern part of Queensland. No doubt there would be difficulties with reference to the climate. It was impossible to ignore the fact that it is a tropical region, and if agriculture is to be pursued in that country, he believed it would not be by the Anglo-Saxon population, but by some Asiatic race, probably the Chinese.

The PRESIDENT: But as a pastoral country?

SIR CHARLES NICHOLSON: As a pastoral country, no doubt, it could be occupied by Europeans. Unfortunately, the rivers which fall into the Gulf of Carpentaria have bars at their mouths; therefore, unless more easy access were found into the interior, it was not probable that any towns would be formed there. The most likely place for a settlement on the Gulf of Carpentaria

would be at Investigator Strait. He was glad to find that so much emphasis had been laid upon the utilising of the magnificent route for navigation on the east coast provided by the Barrier Reef, extending a thousand miles in length, and securing tranquil waters and freedom from the annoyances and dangers of a sea-voyage. Government had been somewhat remiss in not establishing more actively a line of steam-communication by this route. Progress, however, is being made. We have now steam all the way round along the south coast, and up as far as Port Denison. The next point would be Rockingham Bay, and then Cape York; and then they would see what a short distance it was from Cape York to Timor, with which the Dutch Government has a fortnightly steam-communication. The Dutch Government had just made a contract with an English Company for a line of steamers to traverse regularly the whole of the islands with which they have connexion in the Eastern Archipelago. As these steamers would come within a short distance of the coast of Australia, it would be an opprobrium and scandal to the English Government if they did not take the opportunity of extending steam-communication up to that point. He also hoped that Government might be induced to take some steps with a view to the exploration of New Guinea.

CAPTAIN RICHARDS said, on his return from America, a short time since, he had permission to come home by way of Australia, on purpose to pass through the inner route, with the view of forming an opinion as to its practicability for navigation, and also respecting the formation of a settlement at Cape York. He passed through the route, and he considered it a very easy route, free from any difficulties in the way of navigation. The action of the Government in sending out an expedition a few months ago on purpose to establish a colony at Cape York, and to maintain communication between it and Moreton Bay, was one of the most important things that had been undertaken for the last fifty years. Until that settlement was established the country to the north could not be opened, for there was no nearer outlet at present for the produce of the country than Moreton Bay and Port Denison. He knew Mr. Scott very well; he was a wealthy and an enterprising man, and a first-rate wool-grower. He met him at Brisbane; and he also saw Sir George Bowen, and he might be allowed to say that too much credit could not be given to him for all that he had done for the colony.

The PRESIDENT asked if Captain Richards was of opinion that the inner route was the preferable one.

CAPTAIN RICHARDS said that he preferred the inner route himself. There was no doubt, as soon as there was a settlement at Cape York, that steam-communication would be established with Moreton Bay. He thought it very probable, however, that mail-packets from Singapore would take the outer route, and that the inner route would be taken for the eastern coast navigation. The attempts made to colonize North Australia during the last twenty-five years had failed because of the want of communication with other parts of the world, but now everything was favourable in that respect, and he thought the present attempt was made in the right place. Ten years ago Brisbane was a village; it had now a population of 50,000 people. Port Denison had been established two or three years, and in five or six years it would perhaps be as populous as Brisbane. There was another point at Endeavour River favourable for a settlement; and he believed in twenty years' time the whole coast would be as thickly populated up to Cape York as it was at points lower down. It was his opinion, and he believed it had been proved, that it was in vain to attempt the colonization of a country until that great precursor of civilization and commerce had been achieved, viz., the nautical survey of its shores. Twenty years ago this inner passage from Cape York to Moreton Bay was the most intricate in the world; now it was as easy to navigate as the English Channel. Silently but steadily this great work had been progressing during these long years, and it was undeniably one of the most gigantic and splendid undertakings ever carried out by

any nation. It had been accomplished by Captains Blackwood, Owen Stanley, and others, whose names in connexion with it would never be forgotten. He was glad to recognise among those present Commander Evans, one of the most able and eminent of those officers who had laboured in Torres Strait with the late lamented Captain Francis Price Blackwood.

The PRESIDENT was sure they had listened with great attention to what had fallen from Captain Richards. He believed with that officer that comparatively few persons were acquainted with the labours of the distinguished men engaged in the nautical survey of this coast. They were not unknown, however, to the true geographer, who would ever cherish the recollection of these bold and scientific seamen, by whose labours these coasts had been rendered navigable to all the nations of the earth. He was particularly grateful to Captain Richards for having called attention to the feats of his predecessors, which had been admirably brought to a completion by Captain Richards himself.

MR. J. CRAWFURD said he believed it to be impossible to colonise tropical regions with the Anglo-Saxon race. They were too hot for Europeans to inhabit and multiply in. Sir Charles Nicholson admitted that it would be necessary to get Chinese to do the labour. It would not be a European colonisation, where the majority of labourers were Chinese. There would be two distinct races; the Chinese would be the helots, and we should be the masters. It was said the thermometer was never higher than 85° , but they had not been told how low it fell.

SIR CHARLES NICHOLSON said it had been stated that the creeks were covered with ice at Table-land.

MR. CRAWFURD said that the Table-land was only 2000 feet high, consequently the fall of the thermometer could never be more than 4° or 5° . With respect to the question of sheep and wool, and cattle, he must confess he was surprised to hear of the vast flocks that were being driven up to the fifteenth degree of latitude. He ventured to say that at the fifteenth degree of latitude, even at 2000 feet above the level of the sea, no great quantity of wool would ever be produced. He admitted that the sheep would thrive there, get fat, and furnish a large carcase; but why should it produce wool, which it did not want? The expectation of forming a second Singapore at Cape York seemed futile, for what produce were the steamers to get there? Cape York would only be of advantage as a port of call to British ships passing through Torres Straits. With reference to establishing steam-communication with the Dutch possessions, why Timor, the nearest island, was 1000 miles distant.

CAPTAIN EVANS said there was one point deserving of interest in connexion with the settlement at Cape York, and that was New Guinea. About 100 miles from Cape York were the mouths of a vast river, which he in vain endeavoured to ascend with his ship owing to the shallowness of the water. The boats went up, and they found a large population, and the country abounding in sago and palm, and magnificent forest-trees. The houses of the natives were 300 feet long. Of this country, so near to Cape York, we knew nothing, except that there was this river, whose mouths extended over 60 or 100 miles of coast-line. The opening up of this country, viewed in connexion with a settlement at Cape York, was a point that ought not to be lost sight of.

MR. SAUNDERS thought the observations of Mr. Crawfurd as to the impracticability of the north coast as a place for settlement by European labourers ought to be taken into consideration. When Governor Bowen proposed to form a settlement at Cape York, were we to understand that he meant such a settlement as we had at Brisbane, where persons could take 40 or 50 acre lots, and work them by their own labour? He imagined that no such course would be practicable along the northern coast. Nobody ought to think of going to the northern coast who had not been well seasoned in the southern part of Australia. He protested against any proposal that would have the effect of sending out the

poorer class of persons, who would have to labour with their own hands, to the northern part of Australia. He saw no objection to sending out capitalists, who had the means, if they did not like the country, to leave it. There was ample room for the investment of capital in stock; for we could not doubt the statement of Leichhardt that his cattle fattened along the road, sustained as it was by the evidence of squatters. He did not think Cape York would ever be a place of trade; a great many ships might pass, but passing ships did not make a trade. We had to look for the development of the trade of Northern Australia in those parts to which ships could penetrate the farthest into the mainland, whence to draw their exports; and it was the bottom of the Gulf of Carpentaria that would be the great seat of the export and import trade of North Australia. He believed the Liverpool River was the place most worthy the attention of capitalists for settlement, to the north and west of the Gulf.

DR. KINKEL said Mr. Crawfurd had maintained that wool had never been grown in a tropical country, or in a country possessing the natural conditions of the north of Queensland. He thought Egypt was a country the temperature of which agreed very much with what we knew of North Queensland. Now, in Egypt not only had wool been grown, but we were able to prove that the oldest woollen stuffs in existence had been manufactured in Egypt. The rugs surrounding the bones of a mummy in the British Museum—the king who built the third pyramid—were of wool. Again, it was almost certain, from the paintings of the ancient Egyptians, that the covers of their horses were woollen rugs. The existence of sheep in Egypt at a time previous to the invention of linen was proved by paintings found by Lepsius in the tombs of the officers of the Fourth Dynasty, at least 2000 B.C.

MR. DUNCAN said the navigation of the inner route of the Great Barrier Reef was of great importance to the mercantile marine. No doubt it was available for steamers and men-of-war. Last year he lost a fine ship in the outer passage, and he had been listening attentively for information respecting the practicability of the inner passage for sailing-vessels. Of course, much would depend upon the prevailing direction of the winds, and he should like to have some information upon this point.

CAPTAIN RICHARDS said the inner passage was perfectly clear and navigable, and the wind was fair for nine months in the year. Charts and sailing-directions had been published, so that no ship-master could be at a loss.

THE PRESIDENT, in closing the discussion, said that those who had been in the country really thought that sheep could thrive up to nearly 18° of latitude, approaching to the southern end of the Gulf of Carpentaria. He must do Mr. Saunders the justice to say that on former occasions he had spoken of the southern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria as a good place of settlement for English colonists. Between that point and Cape York there was a great difference of temperature. That difference did not depend entirely upon latitude; for it was a matter of fact that the cooling properties of the vast plateaux of land near the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria did limit the heat to such an extent, that he had no doubt, from what he had heard from colonists who had sheep there, that wool might be grown and that Englishmen might live in those regions; but not at the extreme northern point to which they were now invited to go. Up to about 19° north latitude, he was sure there was room enough for all our extra population for many years to come.

He took that occasion to express the deep regret of the Council and himself at the death of their excellent Treasurer, Mr. Robert Biddulph; and stated that, as it was absolutely necessary for the transaction of the business of the Society that a successor should be immediately appointed, they had, subject to the sanction of the Anniversary Meeting, appointed Mr. Reginald T. Cocks, to fill the vacant post.

The Meeting then adjourned.
